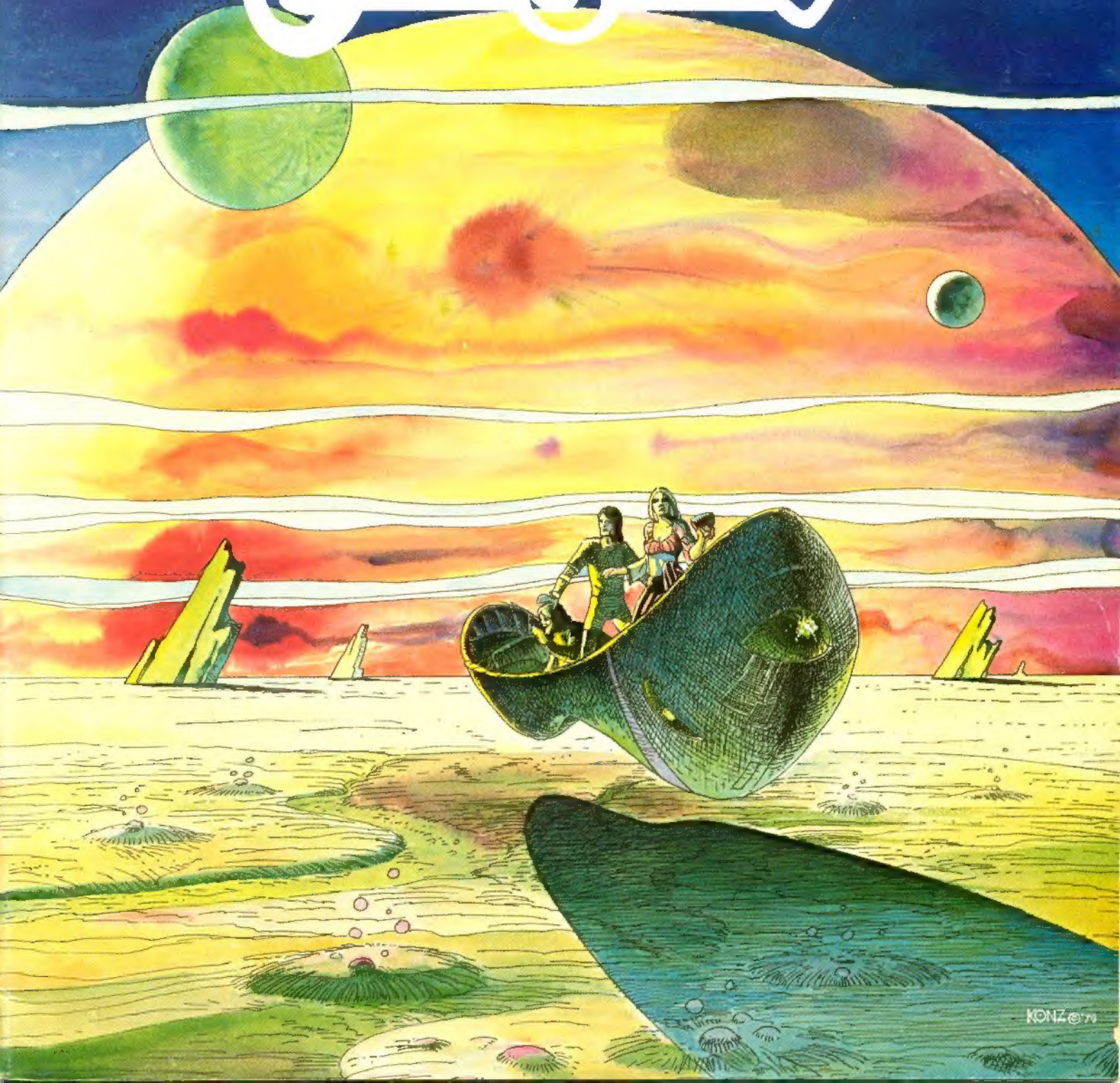


ISSUE 6

\$1.25 CAN. \$1.50
U.K. 70p

Imagine



18 June 1979
Oakland, CA

Over in our companion magazine, STAR*REACH #17, I explain how a new avenue for color story production has been created, by us acting as editorial packagers to larger, mass-market publishers. We've got three stories in HEAVY METAL either out or upcoming: "Free Ways" and "Good Vibrations" by Lee Marrs, and "Elric of Melniboné" by Michael Moorcock and Frank Brunner. And then there's "Siegfried and the Dragon" by Craig Russell, appearing in an early issue of Marvel's EPIC ILLUSTRATED.

And in this last story there lies a tale relating to this issue of IMAGINE. "Siegfried" was originally scheduled to appear in IMAGINE #5 (last issue), when as was explained then we realized we just couldn't afford to run it. Craig had already drawn the story; I took it to New York; first rights to it were bought by Marvel. But for some obscure reason the editor decided he didn't like the last page, as being supposedly misleading, so by mutual agreement a new final page was drawn and will run with the story in Marvel. The original last page (which was fine with me) runs as our back cover. So you get two endings to compare.

On the front cover is the work of a newcomer to these pages, Stephen Konz of Seattle, also featured prominently in the current STAR*REACH. Of himself, he writes, "I was born in Alabama, spent my childhood in Nigeria, high school and college in Texas, moved to Denver and now have resided in Seattle for 4½ years, where I make a living doing product illustration. Doing my own comics was my first artistic venture when I was a kid, and now I've come full circle. Other passions include the mountains (climbing, hiking) and Zen Buddhism (to keep me sane)." I like his fresh approach.

Also in this issue is another segment of Michael Schwaberow's "Nebula" novel, plus a new collaboration by regular contributors Ken Steacy and Dean Motter and a short piece by Masaichi Mukaide.

For the latest info, subscribe to our irregular (every 3 months or so) newsletter by sending us six self-addressed stamped envelopes.

'Bye.



IMAGINE #6 (July, 1979) is published quarterly by Star*Reach Productions, P.O. Box 2328, Berkeley, CA 94704; Mike Friedrich, editor and publisher. © Copyright 1979 Star*Reach Productions. Front cover art and "Dewcatcher" © 1979 Stephen Konz. Back cover ("Siegfried & the Dragon") © 1979 P. Craig Russell. "The Song of Asmodeus" © 1979 Iconoclast Imageworks. "Nebula" © 1979 Michael Schwaberow. "The Salvation" © 1979 Masaichi Mukaide. Address all inquiries c/o Star*Reach Productions.

Contributions are not being accepted at this time.

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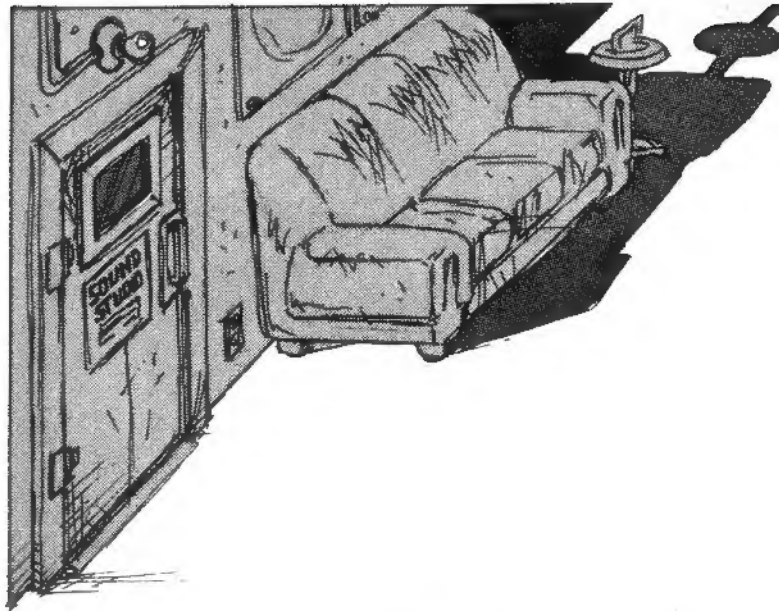
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ANY SIMILARITY TO REAL PERSONS, LIVING OR DEAD, EXCEPT FOR PURPOSES OF SATIRE, IS COINCIDENTAL.

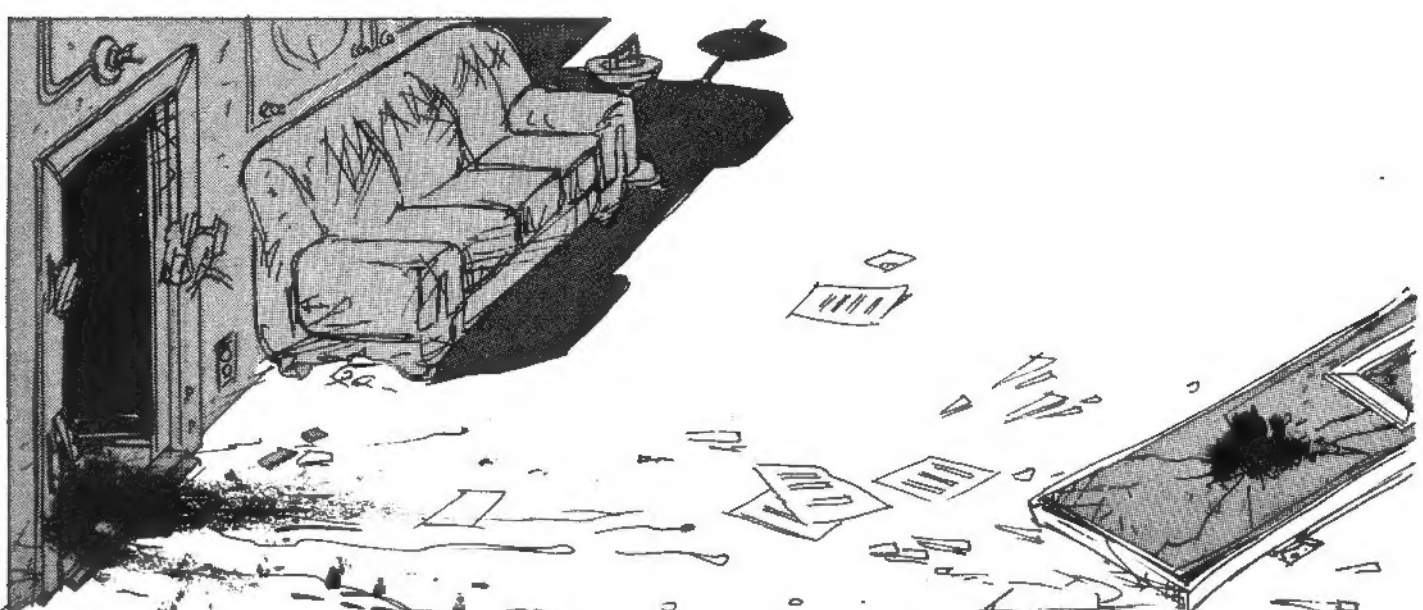
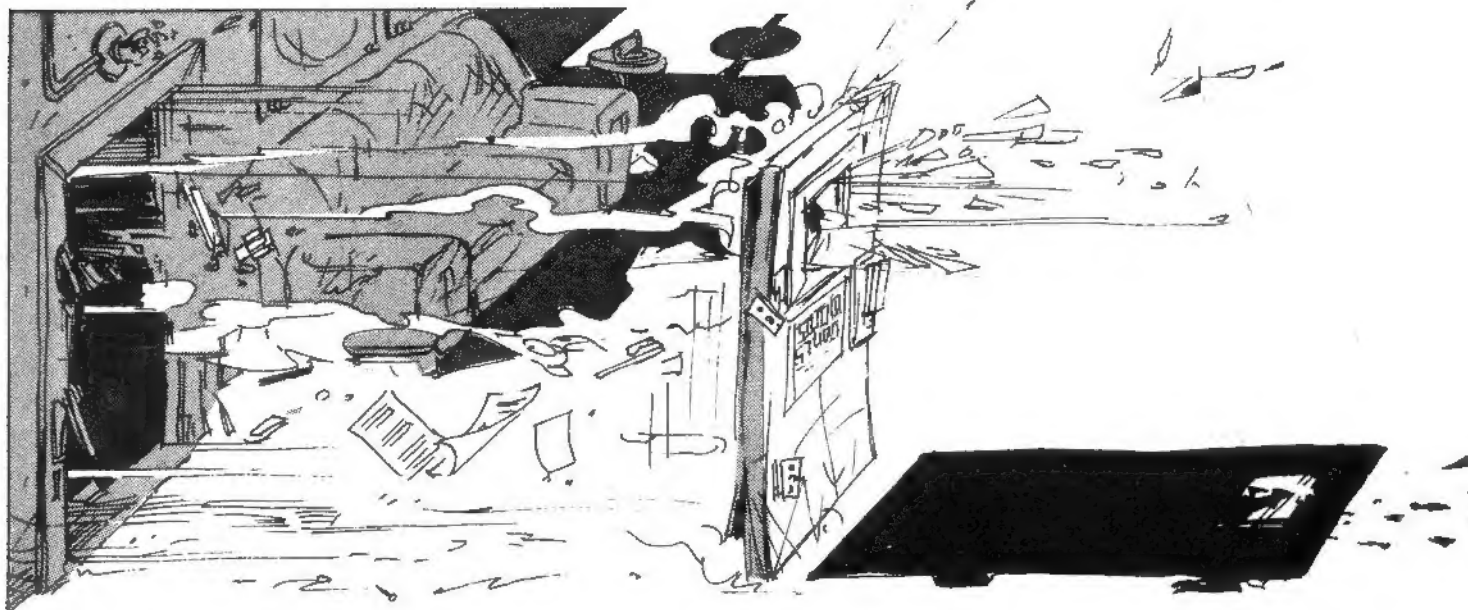


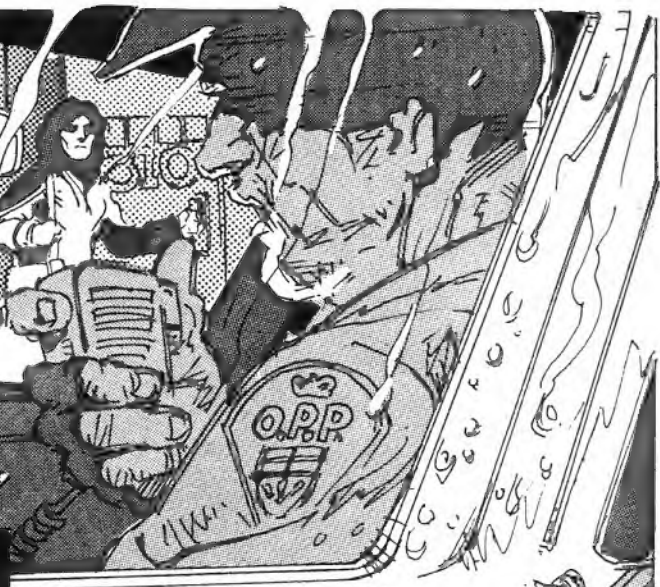
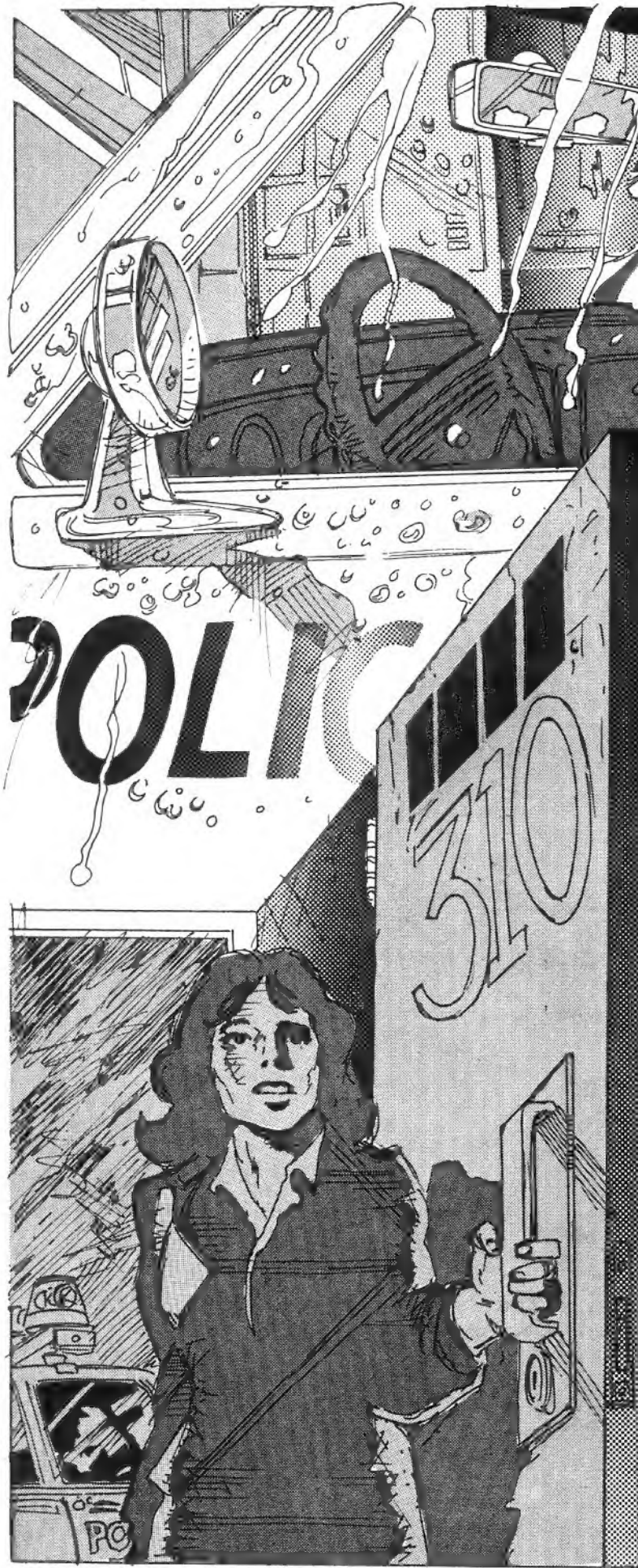
the Song of Asmodeus

(9)



Written and Illustrated by Dean Motter and Ken Steacy





Are you Julie Wisdom?

Yes.

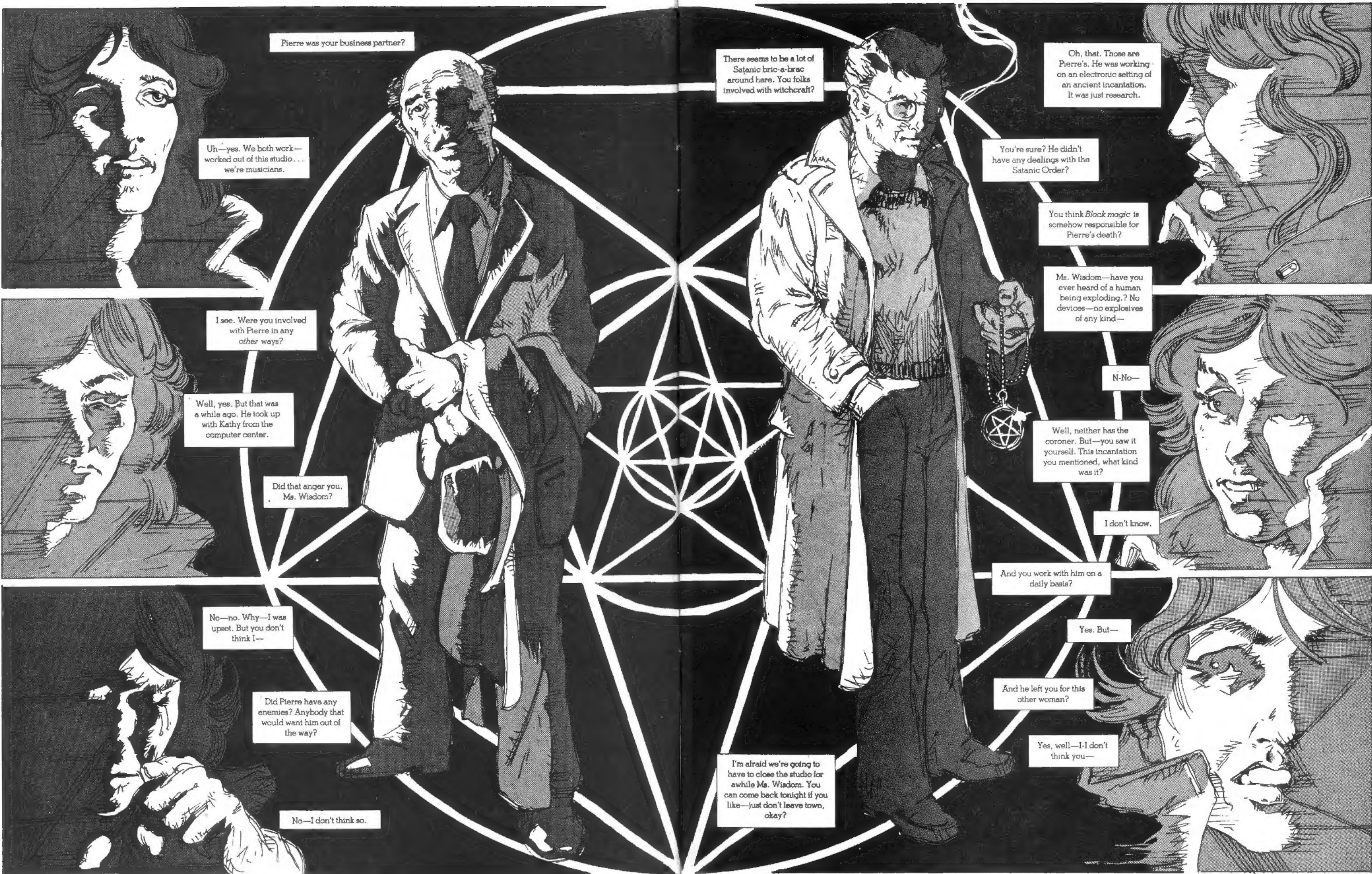
I'm afraid there's been some trouble...

What's happened?



Oh God... Pierru!





Pierre was your business partner?

Uh—yes. We both work—
worked out of this studio...
we're musicians.

I see. Were you involved
with Pierre in any
other ways?

Well, yes. But that was
a while ago. He took up
with Kathy from the
computer center.

Did that anger you,
Ms. Wisdom?

No—no. Why—I was
upset. But you don't
think I—

Did Pierre have any
enemies? Anybody that
would want him out of
the way?

No—I don't think so.

There seems to be a lot of
Satanic bric-a-brac
around here. You folks
involved with witchcraft?

Oh, that. Those are
Pierre's. He was working
on an electronic setting of
an ancient incantation.
It was just research.

You're sure? He didn't
have any dealings with the
Satanic Order?

You think *Black magic* is
somehow responsible for
Pierre's death?

Ms. Wisdom—have you
ever heard of a human
being exploding? No
devices—no explosives
of any kind—

N-No—

Well, neither has the
coroner. But—you saw it
yourself. This incantation
you mentioned, what kind
was it?

I don't know.

And you work with him on a
daily basis?

Yes. But—

And he left you for this
other woman?

Yes, well—I-I don't
think you—

I'm afraid we're going to
have to close the studio for
awhile Ms. Wisdom. You
can come back tonight if you
like—just don't leave town,
okay?



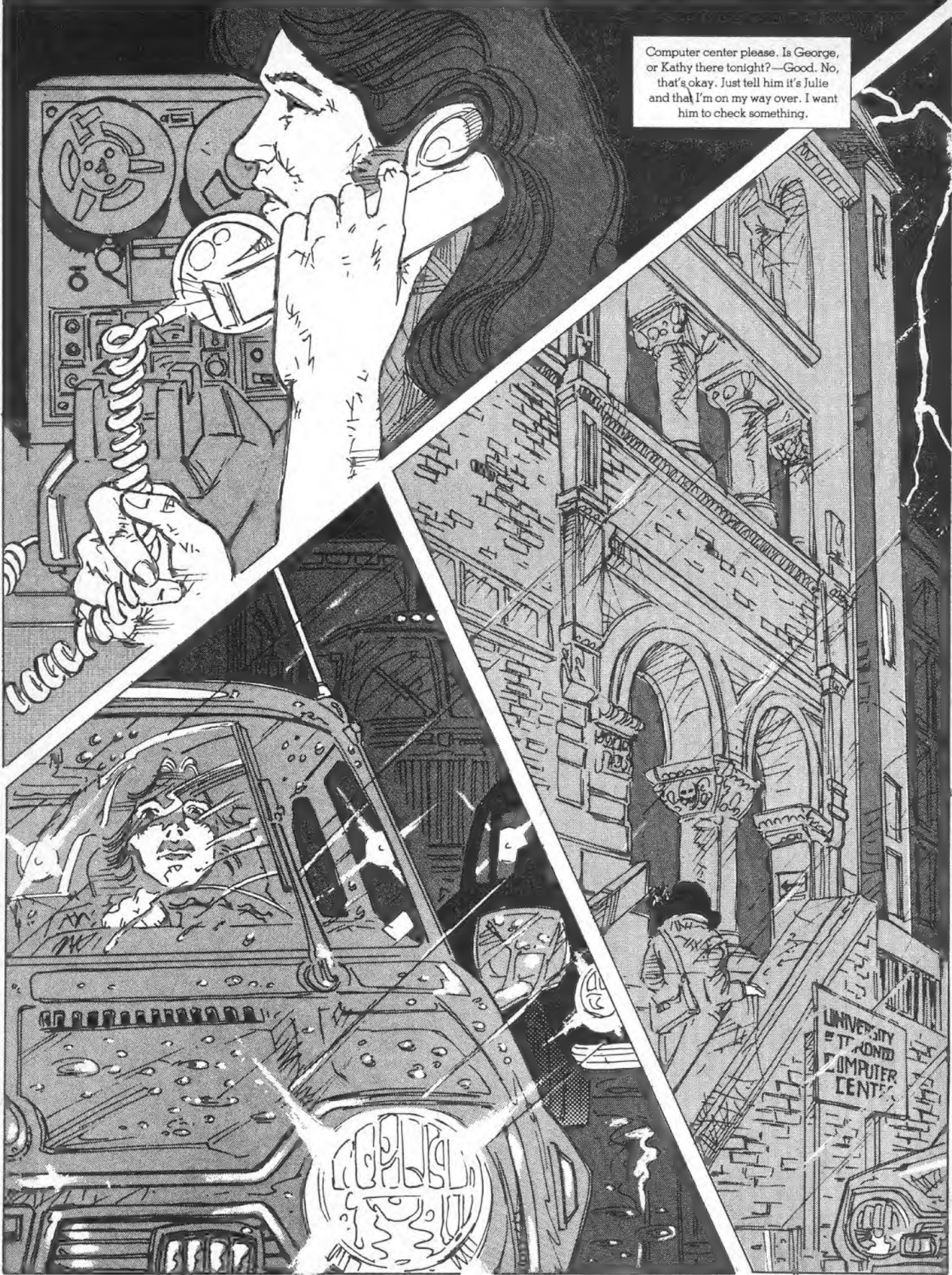
My poor Pierre...
I wonder what you
played last...

That's strange—

Very strange!

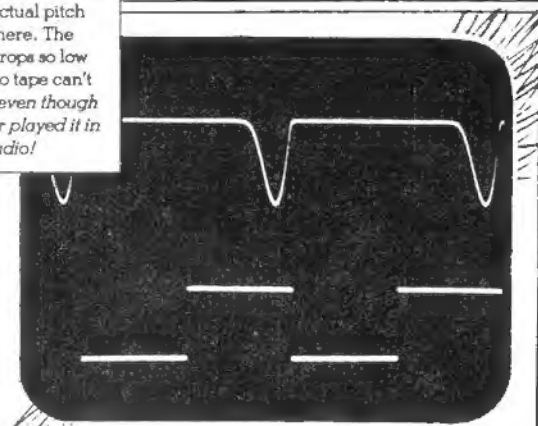
The computer link!

Computer center please. Is George, or Kathy there tonight?—Good. No, that's okay. Just tell him it's Julie and that I'm on my way over. I want him to check something.

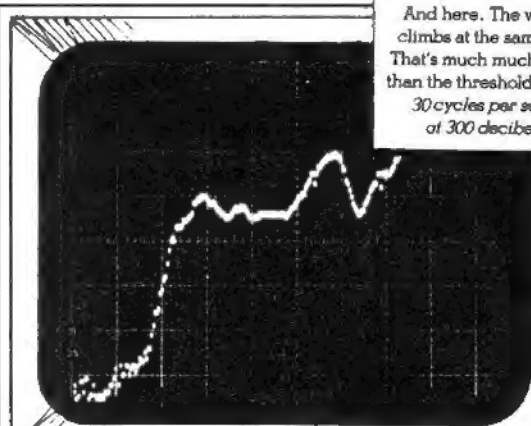




Look. The actual pitch descends here. The frequency drops so low that the audio tape can't reproduce it, even though the synthesizer played it in the studio!



And here. The volume climbs at the same rate. That's much much louder than the threshold of pain! 30 cycles per second at 300 decibels!



—Set up a resonance in his body that would cause every membrane in his body to burst!



That kind of sound would—

But Pierre could never do that manually... only the program could—

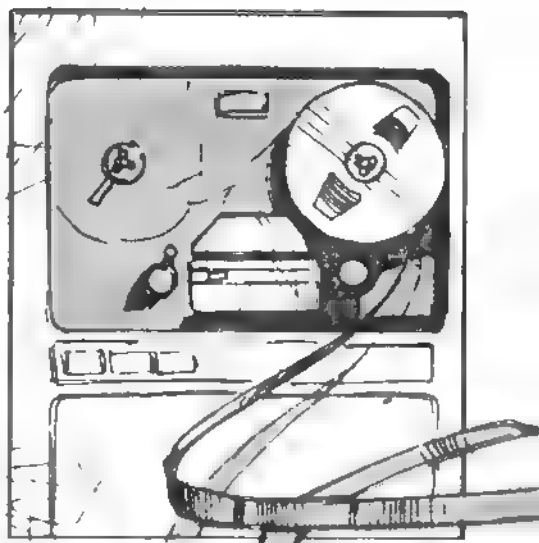
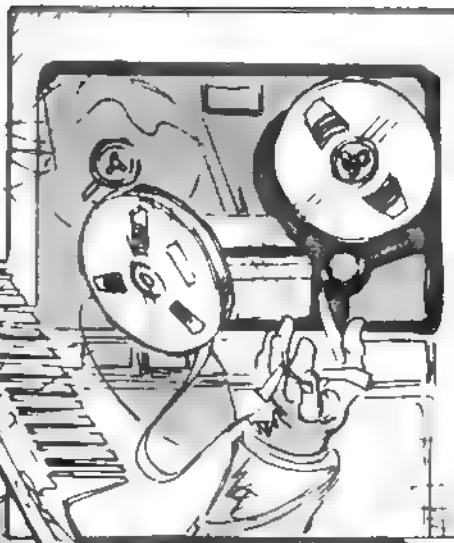
No...



But he had it coming! Kathy was the only woman I ever loved — and he tricked her into leaving me! But you —







Kathy Thank God!



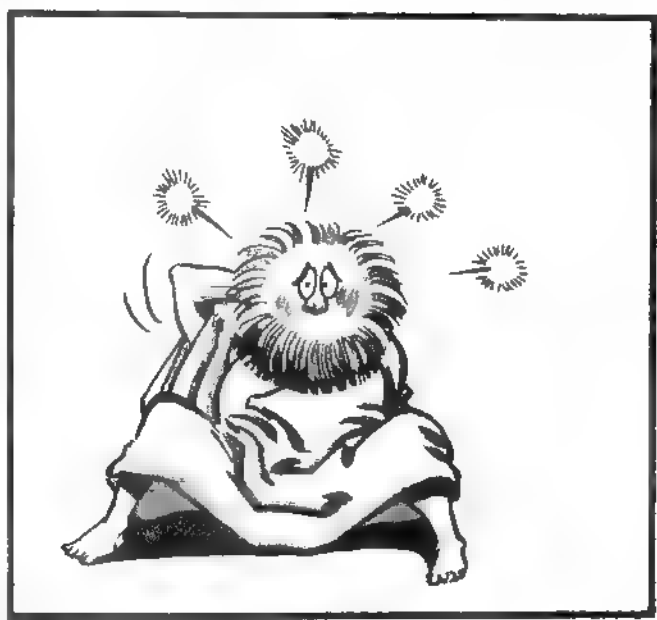
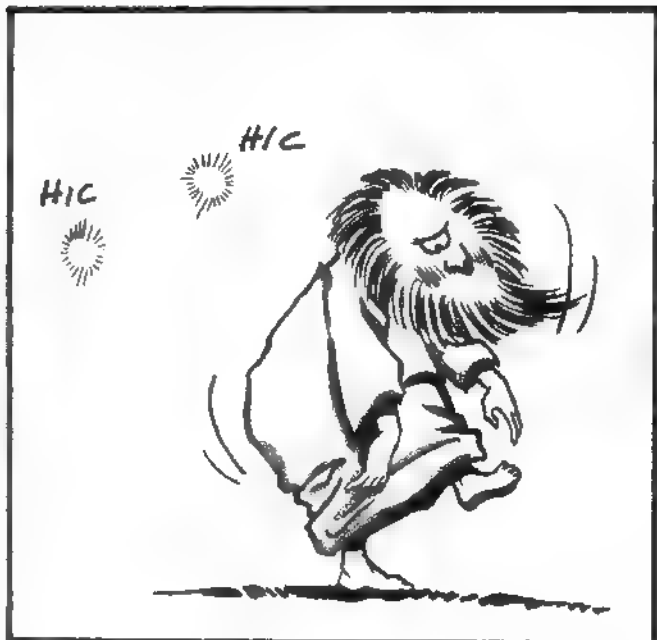
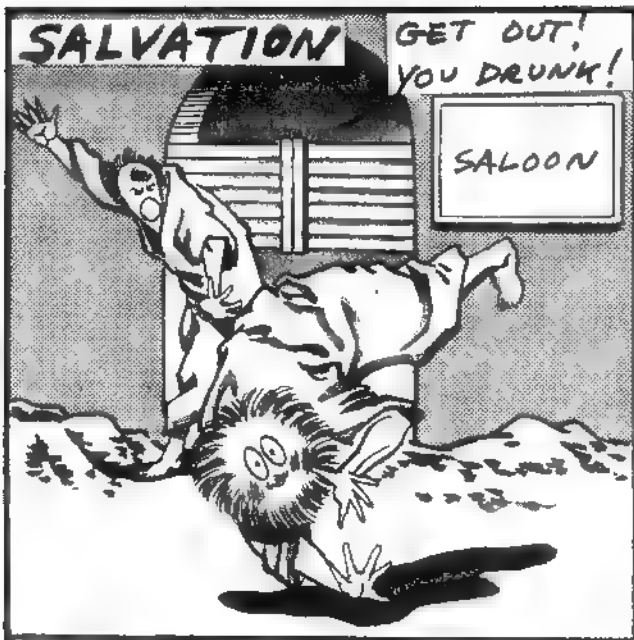
It's okay now Julie

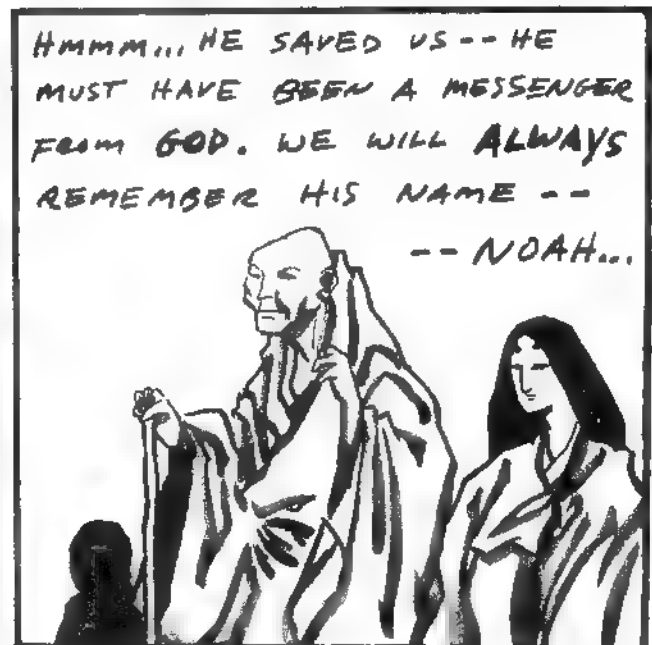
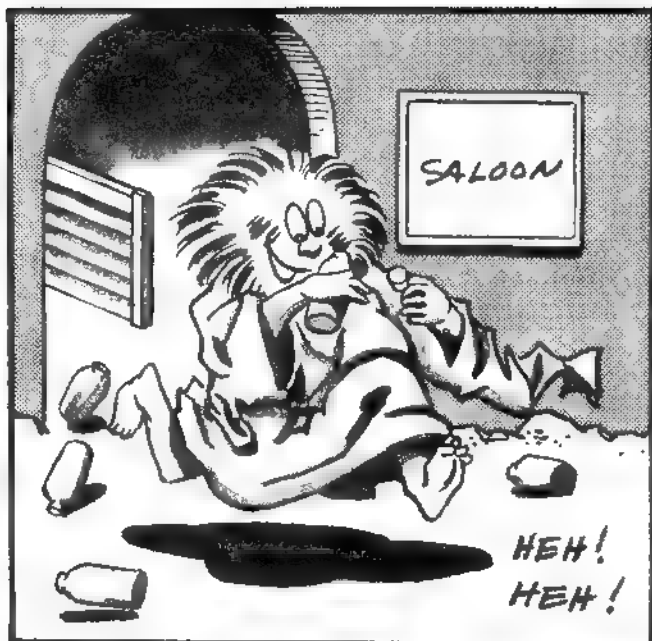
I came down to tell George about what happened to Pierre I heard everything



I think it's still raining outside

END

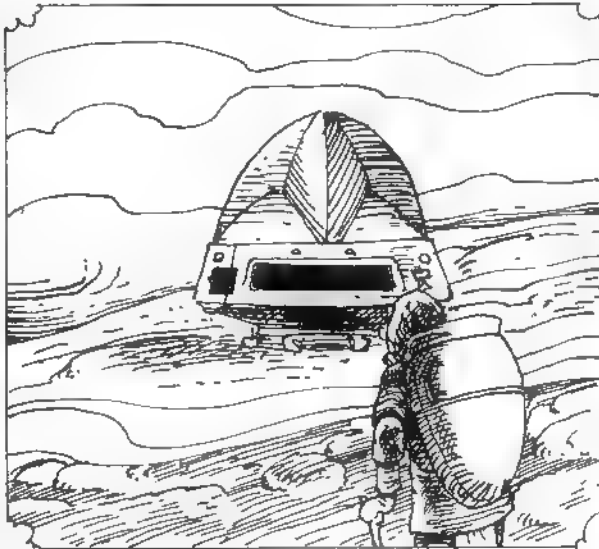
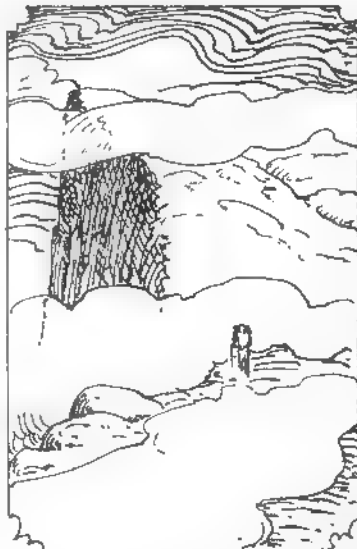




THE DEWCATCHER 9 KONZ '79

FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN
REMEMBER, HE HAS BEEN ROAMING
THESE MISTY MOUNTAINS, FOLLOWING
THE PATTERN UNQUESTIONINGLY,
GATHERING THE DEW FOR
THE UNSEEN VALLEY
PEOPLE





A SIMPLE LIFE IS HIS: GATHER THE NUTRITIOUS DEW, FEED IT INTO THE DEW WELL, EAT, SLEEP, THEN LOOK FOR MORE DEW...

BUT IT IS THE WAY OF THINGS THAT THE SLOW SIMPLE LIFE IS OFTEN POISED PRECARIOUSLY ON THE BRINK OF DRASTIC CHANGE! IT COMES TO OLIMANOV THE DEW-CATCHER AS VOICES ON THE WIND...

ADJ!... * AH... WHAT... *

AND WHATEVER SPIRIT IT IS THAT MOVES A PERSON TO LAY DOWN THE CONDITIONING OF MANY YEARS AND SEEK OUT THE UNKNOWN, NOW MOVES OVER THIS OLD MAN...

NO TELLING *... WHERE...

NO, YOU'RE QUITE WRONG, THULE, DARLING! I'M SURE IT'S JUST THE NATURAL DECLINATION OF THE FIELD THAT I DIDN'T ALLOW FOR! WE'RE STILL LOCKED INTO THE DIMENSIONAL INTERFACE!

WELL, YOU'RE THE ONE WITH A WHOLE TEN MINUTES OF DI-JUMPING EXPERIENCE UNDER YOUR BELT! AND I SUPPOSE THIS MIST AND ROCKS IS JUST A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION!

PLEASE DON'T BE SARCASTIC, LOVE! EVEN IF I HAVEN'T "JUMPED" BEFORE, I DID TAKE A WHOLE COURSE IN DI-THEORY AT SCHOOL! IT'S SIMPLE!



AND YES, THIS IS A FIGMENT OF YOUR IMAGINATION! IN THE SUPRA-DIMENSIONAL MODE, OUR PSYCHE TENDS TO PROJECT OUR SUBCONSCIOUS IMPULSES OUTWARD INTO THE NON MATERIAL UNIVERSE! THINK OF IT AS A DREAM PROJECTED LIKE A HOLOGRAPH, IF YOU WILL! AND IT MUST BE YOUR DREAM, THULE, BE CAUSE I KNOW HOW TO SUPPRESS MINE!

THAT'S REMARKABLE! BUT I'VE NEVER DREAMED THIS DREAM BEFORE! I ONLY DREAM OF YOU, ADJ!

OH, YOU SWEET LIAR! COME OVER HERE AND GIVE ME A BIG KISS..

WHY LOOK! IT'S AN OLD MAN! IS THIS A FATHER-FIGURE OF YOURS?



HA! VERY FUNNY!! YOU KNOW I WAS AT-TUBER JUST LIKE YOU!! DO I LOOK LIKE AN OUTLANDER?

WELL, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?

OH, MARVELOUS! HE EVEN TALKS! I HAD NO IDEA IT COULD BE SO REALISTIC!

I AM OLMANOV, THE DEW-CATCHER! I AM NO DREAM!

THIS IS PRICELESS! LISTEN, UH, OLMANOV, IF YOU'RE FOR REAL, WHERE IS YOUR MEMORY? WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? WHAT IS YOUR PAST? HMM?

ARE-ARE YOU THE VALLEY PEOPLE?

YES, IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT HE'S JUST A PHANTOM!

I ... I CAN'T REMEMBER... IT'S HAZY...

THERE, YOU SEE? YOU'VE BEEN DREAMED UP OUT OF THULE'S PSYCHE WITH ONLY A SEMBLANCE OF MEMORY TO MANIFEST A FACET OF HIS SUBCONSCIOUS! YOU DIDN'T EXIST BEFORE WE GOT HERE AND YOU DON'T REALLY EXIST NOW!

Y'KNOW, HE LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE MY OLD TACHY-PSI PROFESSOR...

NO! THIS CAN'T BE! YOU'RE CRAZY! ... IT CAN'T BE.

... I HAD A REAL LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP
WITH OLD PROF. G.IBLEY! HE WAS BRILLIANT,
BUT SO PROPER, SO ALOOF! DO YOU
SUPPOSE...?

COULD BE...

AAAH!

TO ME, IT IS **YOU**
WHO ARE THE DREAM!
WHO ARE **YOU**?
DO **YOU** HAVE A PAST?
ARE YOU NOT
THE PHANTOMS HERE?

HA'HA! NOT ONLY DO WE HAVE A PAST, BUT WE
HAVE A WONDERFUL FUTURE; WE HAVE
JUST BEEN WED ON BILGARN AND WILL
SOON ARRIVE ON AHLHAMBRA, HONEYMOON
PLANET OF THE GALAXY!

OH, DARLING,
I CAN HARDLY
WAIT!

BAH!
IT'S USELESS!
I'M LEAVING!

WAIT! PROFESSOR!
DON'T BE ANGRY WITH
ME!

LET HIM GO,
THULE, HE'S NOT
REAL! BESIDES,
I'VE GOT THE RIGHT
ALIGNMENT NOW!
"LET'S TRY..."

THIS!

GODDAMMIT, ADJ!!
THIS ISN'T AHLHAMBRA!
YOU ALMOST PUT US IN
THE MIDDLE OF A RED GIANT!
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW
WHAT YOU WERE DOING!

I... I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
WHAT'S WRONG...

WELL, YOU'D BETTER
GET US OUT OF
HERE FAST! THE
FIELD WON'T
HOLD FOREVER!

OKAY!
OKAY!!
TAKE IT
EASY!!

ADJ, YOU DUMBSHIT!
YOU BLEW IT AGAIN!
THERE'S NO TELLING WHERE
WE ARE NOW!
WE'RE LOST!!

DAMN YOU THULE!
YOU MADE ME NERVOUS,
JUMPING ON ME LIKE THAT!
I CAN'T CONCENTRATE
WITH YOUR BITCHING!



OH YEAH? IF IT WEREN'T
THAT YOU ALMOST GOT
US KILLED...

I'M DOING THE
BEST I CAN! WHAT
MORE CAN...
OH LOOK!



IT'S SO
CUTE!
WONDER WHAT
IT IS!!

I THINK IT
SEES US!



IT'S WAGGING
ITS TAIL!
IT MUST BE
FRIENDLY!

BUT ITS BIGGER
THAN IT LOOKS!
THE PERSPECTIVE
HERE IS ODD!...



IT'S HUGE!!
ADJ, D-DO
SOMETHING

YEAH, YEAH...



(WHEW). HEY, THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR.

HM! WE'RE BACK IN THE
INTERFACE! HOW DID
THAT HAPPEN, I WONDER?



AND NOW WHAT? IT'S OBVIOUS YOU DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE WE'RE GOING! MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL OFF THIS WHOLE THING AND GO BACK TO BILGARN! .. OR CAN WE EVEN DO THAT?

BUT WE CAN'T GO BACK NOW! WE STOLE THE JUMPCRAFT, REMEMBER? I COULDN'T BEAR THEM SEPARATING US AGAIN!



WELL, WE CAN'T STAY IN THIS DREAM WORLD FOREVER! I THINK WE SHOULD TAKE OUR CHANCES WITH THE COUNCIL!

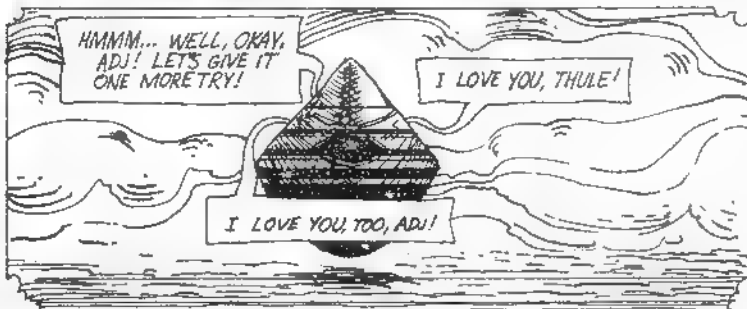


OH, THULE, I KNOW THIS DI-JUMPING IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN I THOUGHT, BUT I'M SURE I CAN EVENTUALLY FIGURE IT OUT! LET'S GIVE IT ANOTHER TRY, OKAY? IT'LL BE SO NICE ON AYLHAMBRA! ... JUST YOU AND ME IN ONE OF THOSE ANTI-GRAV SITES..

HMMM... WELL, OKAY, ADJ! LET'S GIVE IT ONE MORE TRY!

I LOVE YOU, THULE!

I LOVE YOU, TOO, ADJ!



NEBULA

SUMMARY · CHAPTER ONE

HIGHLORD ALBONITUS IS IN A FOUL MOOD. HIS HEAD ASSASSIN KREEGAR HAS GONE SUDDENLY INSANE, AND THE ONLY CLUE IS A MYSTERIOUS RING, WHICH GLOWS AS IF WITH INNER LIFE. TAKING CARE TO HIDE THE RING, ALBONITUS SUMMONS HIS COURT WITCH...



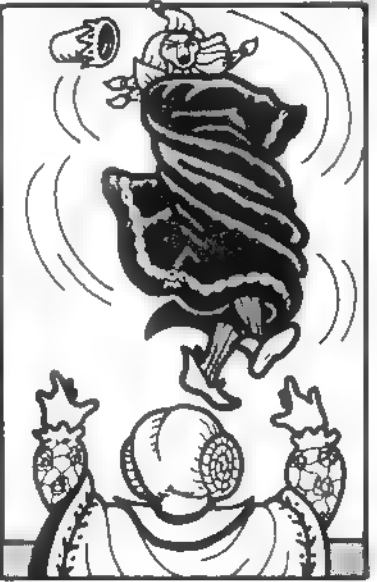
GRETCH TO CONJURE A VISION TO SHED LIGHT ON KREEGAR'S PLIGHT...



INSTEAD, ENEMIES APPEAR IN A CLOUD OF STARDUST... ROSANNA, CALLED NEBULA, HER DAUGHTER CRESCENT... AND THE TALKING CAT INCUBUS. NEBULA HAS TRACED THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HER SON GAVIN...



TO ALBONITUS' THRONE ROOM. ALTHOUGH NEITHER KREEGAR NOR ALBONITUS CAN HELP THEM FIND GAVIN, THEY DO RECOVER GAVIN'S RING...



GRETCH REPORTS TO HER TRUE MISTRESS, THE SMALL BUT EVIL MEGALLA. INCUBUS SHADOWS HER AND LEARNS THAT KREEGAR HAD DONE THE KIDNAPPING UNDER MEGALLA'S ORDERS. UNKNOWN TO ALBONITUS, AND THAT NONE OF THEM HAD KNOWN THAT THE KIDNAPPED BOY WAS NEBULA'S SON. THE CAT ALSO OVERHEARS THAT ROSANNA'S HUSBAND GARTH, WHOM ROSANNA FEARED WAS DEAD, IS IN REALITY BEING HELD CAPTIVE IN A HIDDEN PRISON...



FROM THE RING THEY LEARN THAT GAVIN WAS TURNED OVER TO THE DREAD HENCHMEN OF LORD ARGOT (THE RED BUTCHER) IN THE SUBTERRANEAN SEAS.



ONLY THE MONSTER QUELL, WHO DROVE KREEGAR MAD, KNOWS WHERE ARGOT HAS TAKEN GAVIN; SO IN FEARFUL HASTE THEY JOURNEY TO THE ISLE OF QUELL...



Whenever I read any fantasy literature, it always bothers me that I may be mispronouncing the unfamiliar names. So of course (it always says) I have tried to make the spellings in my story as simple as possible. Then a well-meaning friend called my leading lady "Nen-BOO-uh", and I decided to take steps. I do believe (with only slight trepidation) that the pronunciations I am giving are clear, and I will elaborate on only three: on as in go, aw as in all, and ah as in hat.

ALBONITUS... ahl bon NY tuh
ARGOT... AWR gawt
CRESCENT... KREHS ehnt
GARTH... gawrtn

GAVIN... GAHV ihn
GRETCH... grehtch
INCUBUS... IN kyoo buhs
KREEGAR... KREE gawr

MEGALLA... Meh GAWL uh
NEBULA... NEHB yoo luh
ROSANNA... roh ZAHN nuh
QUELL... kwehl

Quell! Quell!
Spawn of Hell!
The stakes be thine to name!
Quell! Quell!
Thy secrets tell
If I should win the game!

DON'T BLAME YOUR
MOTHER, CRESCENT!
QUELL WROTE IT
HIMSELF!

STARLIGHT SHIMMERS IN THE WORLD BELOW! THE WAITING **BLACKNESS** SWALLOWS BOTH THE LIGHT AND THE R T J A L CHANT! SINCE TIME-BEYOND MEMORY THE CHALLENGE HAS BEEN THE **SAME**, THE OUTCOME **SELDOM DIFFERENT**! NO **BREEZE** HAS EVER STIRRED THE **ETERNAL DOLDRUM** OF THESE SUBTERRANEAN WATERS, NOR **SUNLIGHT** PIERCED ITS **STARLESS EVERNIGHT**! SOME SAY THE ISLE OF QUELL IS IN THE VERY CENTER OF THE **SUNLESS SEAS**! OTHERS CLAIM IT IS AN **EXTENSION** OF THE MONSTER HIMSELF, ITS LOCATION **OBEDIENT** TO HIS **MISBEGOTTEN WILL**!

SILENCE...

THEN FROM FAR AWAY COMES A
FAINT, RHYTHMIC SOUND...
THE **SQUELCH** AND **CRUNCH**
OF A **BEHEMOTH** TREAD ON ROCK
AND MIRE...

WHAT'S THAT
NOISE, MOTHER?

QUELL ALWAYS WALKS
THE PERIMETER
BEFORE APPEARING!
WE CAUGHT HIM OFF-
GUARD, NOT COMING
BY BOAT! ALL HERE
BEFORE US HAVE
HEARD THAT **OMINOUS**
FOOTFALL, BUT FEW
HAVE LIVED TO TELL
ABOUT IT!

"SILENCE"

DAMN HIS SENSE
OF **THEATRICS**! MUST
HE ALWAYS **CRASH**
ABOUT AT FIRST
THEN **TIPTOE IN**
AT THE LAST, JUST
TO **GRATE** ON YOUR
NERVES?!

THE SILENCE YAWNS **DEEPER**! THE R
HEARTBEATS DRUM **LOUDER**! THEY
KNOW HE ALWAYS PLAYS THIS
GAME BUT IT **STILL** HAS ITS
EFFECT.

QUELL HEEDS THY PLEA!
THY GAME SHALL BEE!

QUELL LOOMS OVER THEM LIKE A BLOATED GARGOYLE! HIS LUDICROUS APPEARANCE AND MOCK PROPRIETY BELIE HIS TRUE MALEVOLENCE! THE PALE PHOSPHORESCENCE OF THE PEBBLED SHORE GLISTENS OFF HIS SCALY HIDE! FEW OF THE FIRESIDE TALES OF QUELL EVER NEEDED EXAGGERATION!



GREETINGS, NEBULA, DAUGHTER OF SERAPHHH! I SEE YOU BROUGHT YOUR GIARL CHILD TO VISIT MEE AND A TENDER MORSEL SHE LOOKS TO BEEE! GREETINGS TO YOU, INCUBUSSS, GRANDSON OF NMBUSSS. QUELL HASS MISSED ALL OF YOU SINCE GARTH H BROUGHT MEE HISSS GIFFET!

SPARE US YOUR TWISTED SENSE OF HUMOR. DESTROYER OF MEN! I COME TO ASK A QUESTION!

QUELL'S THROAT WAS NOT MADE FOR HUMAN SPEECH. THE SHRILL SINGSONG IT FORGES TEARS NERVE ENDINGS LIKE A CRUDE SCYTHE. THE CAT REVERTS TO PURE ANIMAL, EYES SLITTED, EARS BACK, CLAWS BARED!

LET MEE GUESS! T SS YOUR SON GAVIN YOU SEEKK QUELL KNOWSS! QUELL KN ASS WHOOD E HIM, AND WHEN, AND WHYYY! AND QUELL KNOWSS WHOO THEY SO-D-HY TOOD! HIGH PRICCCCE! HIGH PRICCCCE! YOUR DAUGHTER'S BONESSS WOULD BEEE QUITE NICCCCE!!!



QUELLS RALCOUS LAUGHTER PUMBLES LIKE SLIDING GRAVEL.

YOU WILL KEEP MY DAUGHTER OUT OF THIS! YOUR GAME IS WITH ME ALONE! AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE IS NOT QUITE SO PRECIOUS AS YOU MIGHT THINK! WE ALREADY KNOW THAT KREEGAR KID NAPPED GAVIN FOR MEGALLA! WE KNOW THEY LEFT HIM HERE BELOW FOR ARGOT'S DARK BOATMEN! MY QUESTION IS A SIMPLE ONE! WHERE IS ARGOT? NOW NAME THE STAKES, THAT I MAY CHOOSE THE GAME!



AHHH YESSS! KREEEGAR!! MEE AND QUELL PLAYED GOODD GAMESS TOGETHER! BUT MEE BROKE TOO EASILYEEE...



YOUR HAIR! ALL THEE HAIR YOU EVER GROW UNTIL ETERNITEEE!

SO BE IT! WE PLAY THE GAME OF BONES AND SPHERES!

MOTHER!

HUSH CHILD!

WITH A MULTIPLE SHRUG, QUELL TURNS AND HEADS UP A STEEP AND TIME-WORN PATH...

YOUR MOTHER DID WELL! IT IRKED QUELL TO HAVE HIS BARGAINING POWER DEFLATED! HIS PRICE WAS QUICK AND LOW! HE IS ALSO DISPLEASED AT THE CHOICE OF GAMES! ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS IT IS TOO SHORT FOR HIS MORBID TASTES!

WHAT IS QUELL INCUBUS?

THE CAT SPITS IN ANSWER

NEBULA IS SILENT... GATHERING STRENGTH... TREADING WATER IN AN OCEAN OF FEAR...

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT QUELL IS! HIS NAME IS IN THE OLDEST SONGS! HIS POWER IS FEARED BY ALL CLANS! HE NEVER TAKES SIDES!

PERHAPS HE IS THE LAST MEMBER OF SOME LONG FORGOTTEN RACE, GROWN INSANE WITH COUNTLESS YEARS!

AS HE PLODS UP THE SLOPE, QUELL GATHERS CASTOFF BONES! THOSE THAT FOLLOW ENVISION THEIR OWN BONES BEING USED IN THE MORROW'S GAME...

HIS KNOWLEDGE IS UNCANNY! LITTLE HAPPENS IN THE SUNLESS SEAS OR ABOVE THEM THAT ESCAPES HIS EAR HIS PASSION FOR GAMES IS INSATIABLE!

AS THEY NEAR THE TOP OF THE ROCKY FACE, QUELL BEGINS HUMMING A WORDLESS DIRGE...

HE HATES TO LOSE!

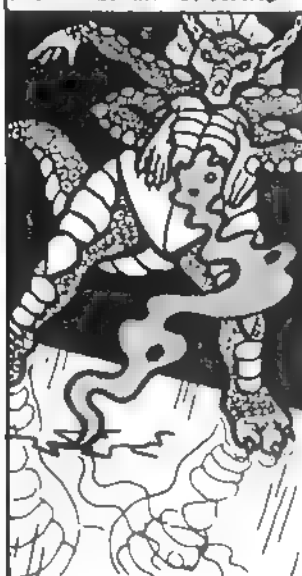
BUT THEN, HE ALMOST NEVER DOES

THE SUMMIT IS UNNATURALLY SMOOTH AND GLASSY, AS THOUGH SHEARED OFF BY A MAMMOTH SWORD. IN THE VERY CENTER IS A GAPING HOLE, PERFECTLY ELLIPTICAL IN SHAPE AND SEEMINGLY BOTTOMLESS! QUELL ADDS HIS COLLECTION TO A LARGER PILE OF BONES THEN WALKS AROUND TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE PIT, CLACKING AND BURBLING TO HIMSELF...

I HAVE HEARD LEGENDS OF THIS PLACE, BUT I NEVER HOPED TO SEE IT



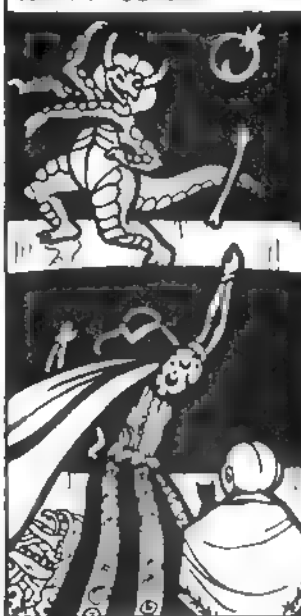
A THIN STREAM OF WATER TRICKLES FROM THE ONLY CRACK IN THE STONE MIRROR! AS QUELL GESTURES, IT SPURTS EERILY UPWARD...



TO FORM A DELICATE LIQUID SPHERE IN HIS MISSHAPEN HANDS...



QUELL TOSSES THE SPHERE OVER THE ABYSS AND NEBULA COUNTERS WITH A BONE

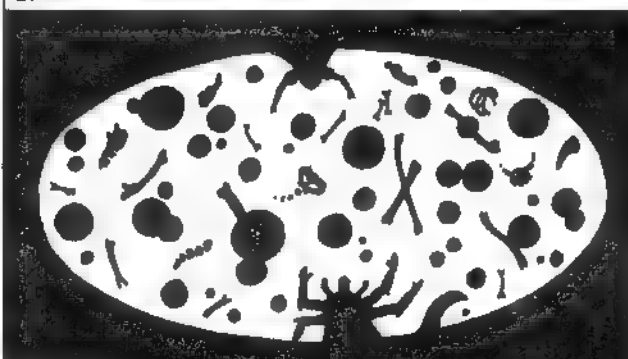


CAUGHT ON **ELDRITCH STRINGS**, THE BONE AND SPHERE TWITCH AND BOB SPASMODICALLY, THEN STABILIZE, DANGLING ON NOTHING... OVER NOTHING...



AND THE MAGIC BELONGS TO THE PLACE, NOT TO QUELL.

IN RAPID SUCCESSION THE THROWS ARE EXCHANGED, UNTIL THE AIR OVER THE CHASM IS ALIVE WITH AN INCREDIBLE, SLOW-MOVING BALLET IN DEFIANCE OF GRAVITY...



THE FINAL PIECES ARE CAST! THE BIZARRE CHOREOGRAPHY STRIKES A FRAGILE BALANCE, AND HOLDS!



THEE GAME I CALL THE **BONESS AND SPHERES!** THEE RULESS I QUOTE: THE GAME BEE DONE WHEN **ONLY ONE** PIECE YET DOTHN FLOAT! WITH **ONE MISTAKE** THE SPELL YOU BREAK! FORFEITING ALL!!!

YOU FIRSST, MY DEEEAR!

DAMN HIS INFERNAL IAMBIC!

FOR LONG MOMENTS NEBULA SEARCHS THE ENIGMATIC ARRAY FOR A HINT OF **PATTERN**, SEEING THE FATE OF HER SON HANGING OVERHEAD AS WELL...



THE ONLY SOUND IS THE **SOFT THUNDER** IN INCUBUS' THROAT, AS HIS **ANGER** AND HIS **HELPLESSNESS** MOUNT HAND IN HAND...



DECISION!

THE CONFIGURAT ON
LURCHES AND WHEELS
DRUNKENLY, THEN
READJUSTS TO A
GRUDGING SYMMETRY!
QUELL HAS PLAYED THIS
GAME A THOUSAND
TIMES, AND STILL THE
SEQUENCE SEEKS TO
ELUDE HIM...

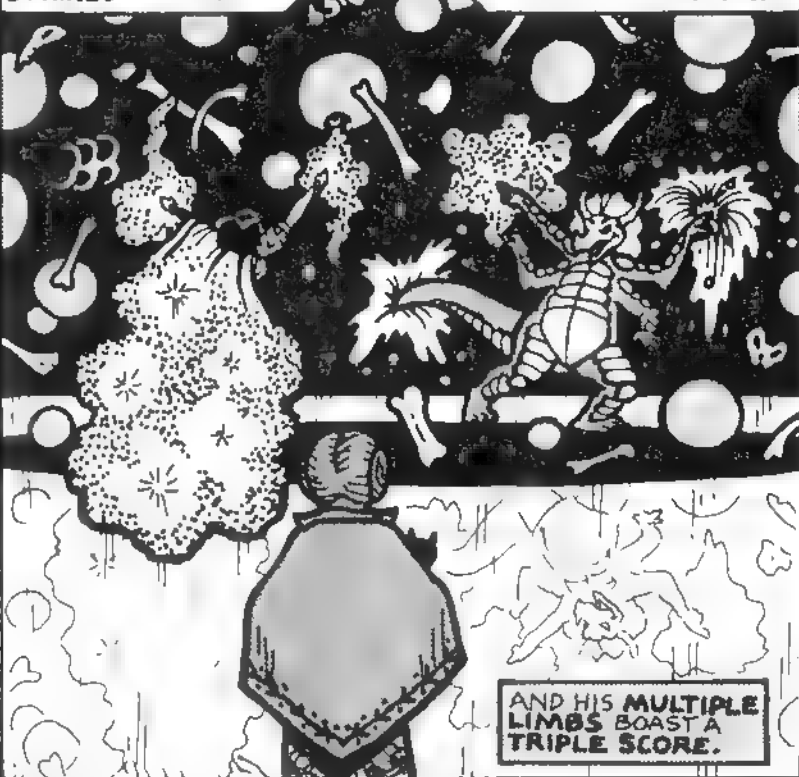


THEN A WHIPCRACK
HAND SENDS A
CASCADE OF BONE DUST
INTO THE MOUTH
OF THE PIT!

QUELL BEGINS A SONG...

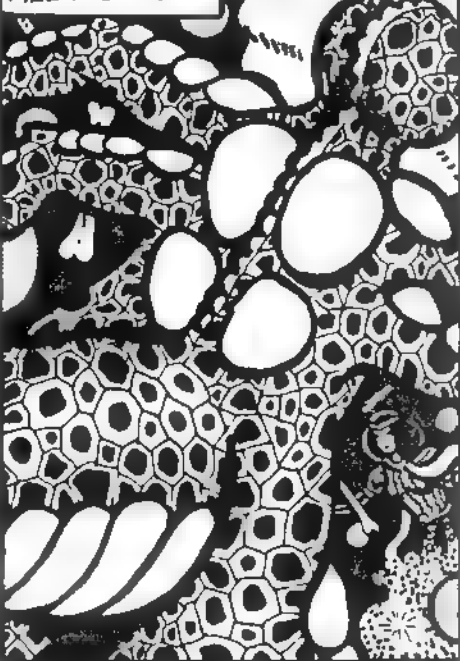
NEBULA'S BODY DISSOLVES
INTO SWIRLING MIST AS
SHE MAKES TWO RAPID
STRIKES IN A ROW!

QUELL'S DISCORDANT BALLAD
BOASTS OF HIS LONG LIFE,
OF THE MANY GAMES
HE'S PLAYED AND WON...



AND HIS MULTIPLE
LIMBS BOAST A
TRIPLE SCORE.

LIGHTNING BURSTS THAT SEND THE
BONES, THE SPHERES, AND THE SENSES
ALL REELING ..



... ALTERNATE WITH LONG TENSE
INTERVALS OF WATCHING AND
WAITING! NEBULA BECOMES TIGHT-
LIPPED AND DRAWN, WHILE QUELL
CROONS HIS OWN PRAISES LONG
INTO THE EVERNIGHT!

THE GAME IS ALMOST
EVEN! ONLY HALF OF
THE TARGETS REMAIN,
AND THE BALANCE GROWS
MORE CRITICAL AT
EVERY MOVE. WITH A
MANIACAL SURGE OF
ENERGY NEBULA STRIKES
AGAIN AND AGAIN, HER
HANDS DARTING LIKE
QUICKSILVER!

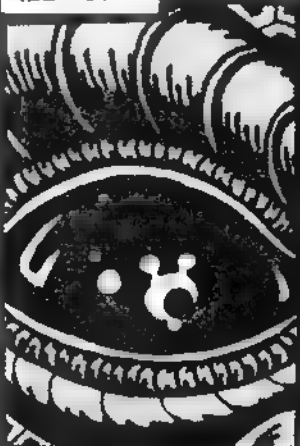


INCUBUS LOOKS ON
WITH RISING HORROR"
HE KNOWS NEBULA
TOO WELL! THE UN-
RELENTING PACE HAS
ALL BUT DRAINED HER,
AND THIS LAST
DESPERATE SPURT CAN
ONLY LAST A FEW
MORE SECONDS...



... NOT NEARLY LONG
ENOUGH TO FINISH
THE GAME!

QUELL'S SONG ABRUPTLY
WITHERS TO AN
OMINOUS GURGLE, AND
HE ACCELERATES TO
KEEP UP...



... AS THE DARK HINT
OF DOUBT FLICKERS
ACROSS HIS REPTILIAN
EYES...



FOR THE FIRST TIME
SINCE THEY REACHED
QUELL'S ISLE, INCUBUS
ALLOWS HIMSELF TO
HOPE!





MOTHER! MOTHER!

I'M ALL RIGHT! IT'S ALMOST OVER!

QUELL! YOU HAVE SHATTERED THE BALANCE AND FORFEITED THE GAME! DID YOU FEAR THAT I WOULD WIN?

YOU BEAT HIM! YOU BEAT HIM!



YOU FLATTER YOURSELF MY DEEAR!! QUELL HASS WON THISSS GAME A THOUSSAND TIMESS!! I MEERELY GREW BORED OF ENTERTAINING YOU AND YOUR MOTLEEE ENTOURAGE!

NOW TELL YOUR HAIRYY FRIEND TO CEASSSE HISS CHILDISHH ANTICSS, IF HE WISHESS TO LEEAVE WITH ALL HISS WHISKERSS INTACT!!

DO YOU KEEP YOUR END OF THE BARGAIN? WHERE IS ARGOT?



THEE RED BUTCHER HOLDSS YOUR SON AT THE CASTLE OF CRAGSS IN THE HEART OF ASHEN-WASTE! PROVIDING YOUR SON IS STILL ALIVE!!



NOW BEEGONE, WHILE YOU YET HAVE THEE POWER! WHEN NEXT YOU COME, I SHALL NOT BEEE SO KIND!!

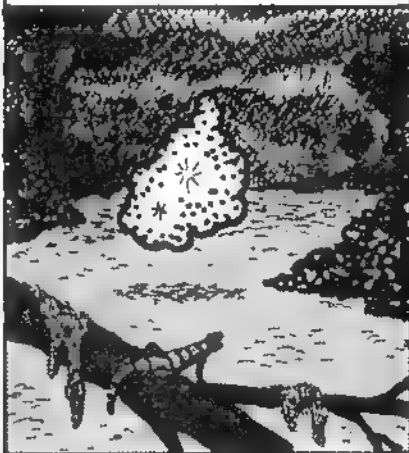


OH BY THE BYYYY.. QUELL KNOWSS WHYYY ARGOT WANTSS YOUR SON...

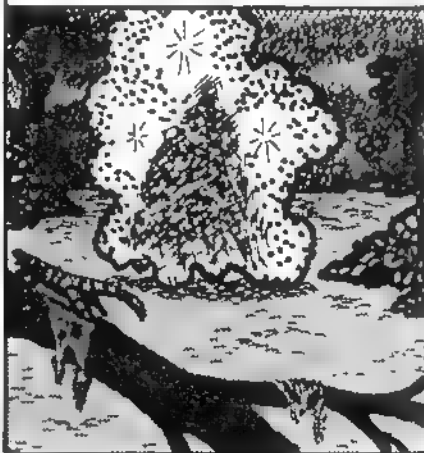
BUT THAT ISS ANOTHER GAME...

AND THE EMPTINESS REVERBERATES WITH THE HARSH CACOPHONY OF HIS LAUGHTER!

IN THE UPPER WORLD A TINY SLIT
PERCES THE FABRIC OF THE PRE-
DAWN LEAKING STARDUST...



AS A BONE-WEARY NEBULA,
CHANNELING BORROWED POWER
ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE WORLDS...



WITH AN ARCAN E DOORWAY!

MOTHER!
INCUBUS
SHE'S
COLLAPSING!

I'LL BE ALL RIGHT,
CRESCENT JUST
SO WEAK...



EASE HER ONTO
THE SOFT MOSSY
GROUND

SO TIRED...
THE FRESH
AIR SMELLS
DELICIOUS!

YOU WON, MOTHER!
YOU BEAT QUELL
AT HIS OWN GAME!"

YES AND NO CHILD!
AS INCUBUS GUESSED,
I COULD NOT HAVE
LASTED THE GAME!
I HAD ALMOST
DEPLETED ALL OF
MY ENERGY JUST
TO KEEP UP WITH
HIM DURING THE
FIRST HALF"



I POURED ALL OF MY REMAINING
STRENGTH INTO THAT LAST BURST,
GAMBLING THAT QUELL DIDN'T KNOW
HOW EXHAUSTED I REALLY WAS
PRAISE THE GIVER, QUELL
FELL FOR MY BLUFF!!
HIS BLOATED EGO
COULDN'T STOMACH
THE POSSIBILITY
OF LOSING!



NOW THAT WE
KNOW WHERE
ARGOT IS WE
MUST WASTE
NO TIME



ROSANNA ROSANNA! HOW CAN YOU
SAVE GAVIN WHEN YOU CAN'T
EVEN STAND UP? YOU BOTH NEED TO
REST... TO SLEEP... SLEEP...



HE CAT'S PAW RIPPLES
GENTLY OVER THE MOTHER
AND DAUGHTER WASHING
AWAY THE RWEARNESS
SOOTHING THEIR FEARS...

BATHING THEM IN A DEEP,
DREAMLESS SLUMBER!



INCUBUS WATCHES AS THE SKY SOFTENS AND GRAYS, DRAWING
TENTATIVE OUTLINES OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS! HE FINDS REST IN A
SONG AS OLD AS HIS PEOPLE



"I AM TIRED I AM WEARY
I HAVE WALKED A THOUSAND MILES
A MILLION DREAMS CAN AWAKE ME
BUT I DO NOT KNOW THE WAY...
THE WAY... I KNOW

AND THE SKY RESPONDS
WITH A NEW DAWN!

NEBULA

BEWARE OF
ASHENWASTE
MY SON

THERE IS NO BEAUTY
IN ASHENWASTE.
A GREAT TRAGEDY,
WHETHER OF ANGRY
GODS OR ANGRY
MEN, HAD RAZED
IT IN TIME-OUT-OF-
MIND, LEAVING A
DEAD LAND, GRAY
AND EMPTY, A
WOUND UPON THE
EARTH.



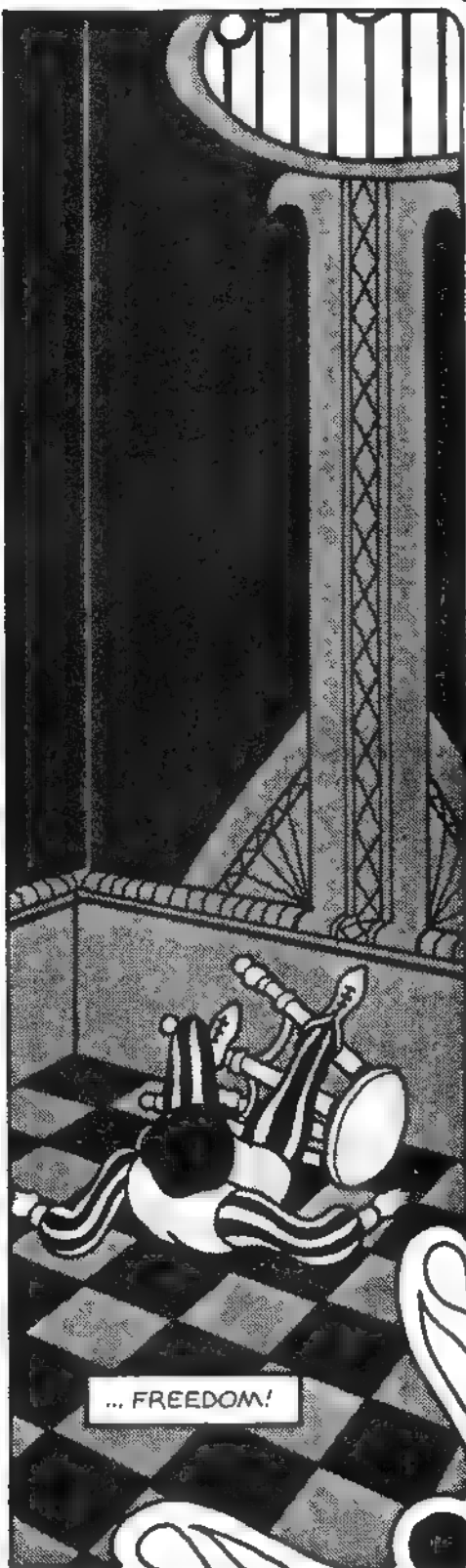
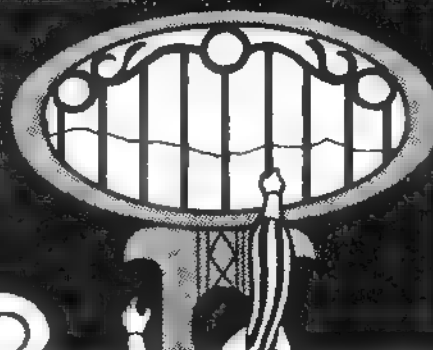
THE MOUNTAIN
IRONSMITH, BROUGHT
HERE IN CHAINS IN
AN AGE PAST, KNEW
THIS. THE ORNATE
IRONWORK HE
FORGED FOR THE
WINDOWS OF THE
CASTLE OF CRAGS
COULD DO LITTLE
TO SOFTEN THE
BLEAK HORIZON.



THE DESOLATE GRAY
EXTENDS AS FAR AS
THE EYE CAN SEE.
IN TRUTH, FEW
WOULD WORK AS
HARD TO SEE IT AS
GAVIN NEBULA'S
SON. HIS VISION
IS OF A DIFFERENT
SORT.



THE
BEAUTY
HE
SEES
IS
CALLED..



... FREEDOM!

GAVIN LOOKS AT HIS HANDS, SORE AND BLEEDING FROM SLIDING DOWN THE ROUGH WALL SO MANY TIMES, FROM STRAINING AGAINST BARS FAR BEYOND HIS YOUNG STRENGTH.



HE ALMOST LAUGHS! THE IRON BARS ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE HIDDEN POWER OF HIS HANDS!



AND SHUDDERING, HE REMEMBERS...

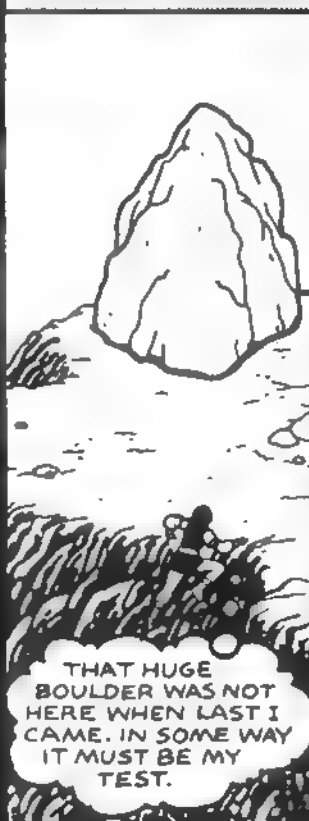


IT HAD BEEN ALMOST A YEAR NOW, BUT HIS FATHER'S WORDS ARE STILL CLEAR IN HIS MIND. "THERE IS A THING YOU MUST KNOW, MY SON. WHEN YOU WERE VERY YOUNG A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT HAPPENED. INCUBUS TOOK THE MEMORY OF IT FROM YOU, THAT IT WOULD NOT HARM YOU AS YOU GREW UP. AND I FASHIONED YOU A RING OF MY OWN ENERGY TO PREVENT ITS EVER HAPPENING AGAIN."



"YOU HAVE WORN THIS RING EVERY MOMENT SINCE YOU KNOW IT ONLY AS A POWER-CHANNELER, TO HELP YOU LEND YOUR POWER TO OTHERS WHEN THERE IS NEED. KNOW NOW THAT IT IS A POWER-DAMPENER AS WELL. YOUR POWER IS DIFFERENT THAN MINE, AND PERHAPS GREATER. BUT YOU HAVE NO NATURAL CONTROL. WE HOPED IT WOULD DEVELOP IN TIME, BUT IT NEVER HAS. IT IS LONG PAST TIME FOR YOU TO LEARN THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR POWER. OUR PEOPLE WILL SOON HAVE GRAVE NEED OF YOUR GIFT."

"CLIMB TO THE SHELF OF GIANTS ON THE SOUTH FACE OF THE SPEAKING MOUNTAIN. THERE YOU WILL UNDERGO A TEST."



THAT HUGE BOULDER WAS NOT HERE WHEN LAST I CAME. IN SOME WAY IT MUST BE MY TEST.

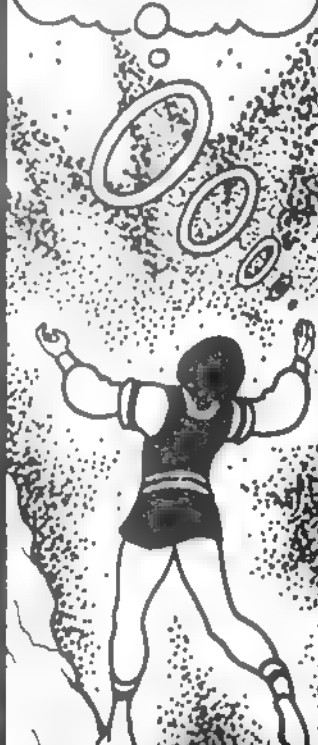
"THE RING WILL BE YOUR CONTROL, YOUR FOCUS AND YOUR CHANNELER."

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FORBIDDEN TO REMOVE MY RING. WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

I FEEL A TINGLING, BURNING SENSATION. MY HANDS ARE BEGINNING TO GLOW!



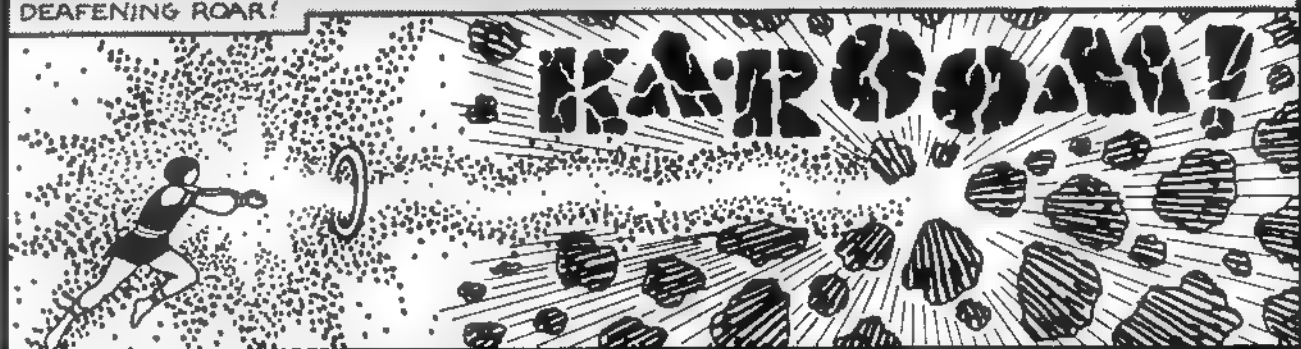
THE RING IS FLOATING UP OF ITS OWN ACCORD.. GROWING LARGER AND LARGER! MY BODY IS ON FIRE WITH THE RELEASED ENERGY!



THE POWER IS FLOWING UP INTO TWO PULSING ENERGY-SPHERES AROUND MY HANDS! I CAN FEEL IT PEAKING... BURNING...



DRAWN LIKE OPPOSING MAGNETIC POLES, GAVIN'S HANDS THUNDERED TOGETHER WITH A DEAFENING ROAR!



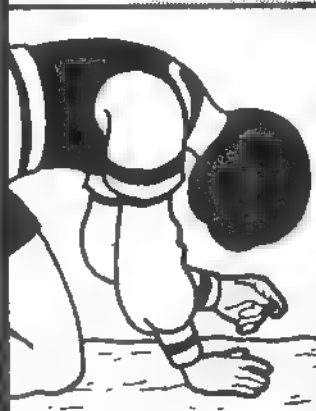
THE EXPLOSION IN HIS MIND WAS OF EQUAL INTENSITY. ALL ENERGY DRAINED FROM HIS BODY, GAVIN WEAKLY RETRIEVED THE FALLEN RING.

THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF HIS NEWFOUND POWER STRETCHED GAVIN'S MIND TO THE THE BREAKING POINT...

AND THE TERROR OF THAT NAMELESS VOID SCREAMED...

DESTROYER!
DESTROYER!
DESTROYER!

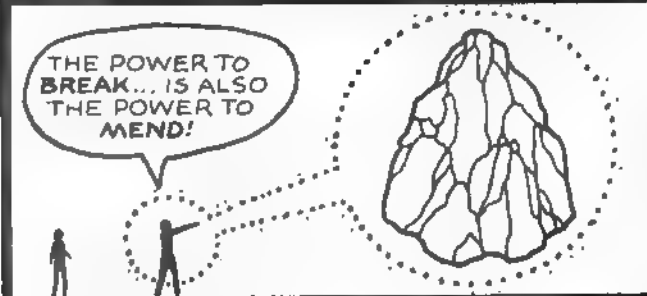
A HARD LESSON, MY SON. I AM GLAD YOU CAN CRY. THE FEAR OF YOUR OWN POWER IS A GOOD THING TO HAVE. IT IS A LESSON I HAVE LEARNED THE HARD WAY AS WELL. BUT DON'T DESPAIR! YOUR POWER IS TWO-FOLD.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FATHER?



WATCH.



THE POWER TO BREAK... IS ALSO THE POWER TO MEND!



BUT I CANNOT TEACH YOU HOW. YOU MUST FIND YOUR OWN WAY..

IF I HAD MY WAY...



YOU COULD DAYDREAM ALL DAY AND NEVER EAT THE BREAKFAST I'VE BROUGHT. BUT MY MATTER LIETH WITH GUETHTS TO BE WELL FED CAREFUL! YOU'RE THPILLING IT!

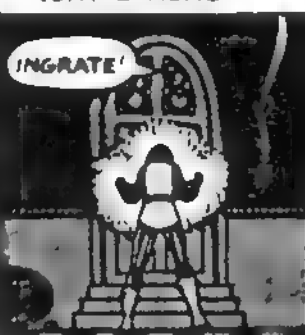
THE HEAVY DOOR SLAMS SHUT. GAVIN HAD LEARNED MORE ABOUT HIS POWER SINCE THAT DAY ON THE MOUNTAIN. SOME TIMES IT FADED OUT COMPLETELY. OTHER TIMES IT CAME ON VERY STRONG

WHEN IT MOUNTS TO ITS PEAK, HE WILL DETONATE WREAKING RANDOM DESTRUCTION WITH ANYTHING AND ANYONE THAT IS TOO CLOSE PERHAPS TAKING HIS OWN LIFE AS WELL.

THAT PEAK WILL COME SOON AND WITHOUT THE RING HE HAS NO HOPE OF CONTROLLING IT. AS THE BLACKNESS ENFOLDS HIM, THE EVER-PRESENT NIGHT-MARE RETURNS



WHO IS YOUR MASTER? WHAT DOES HE WANT OF ME?



INGRATE!

HE CAN FEEL IT BUILDING AND BURNING WITHIN HIM NOW AS HE STRUGGLES TO CURB HIS ANGER AND HIS FRUSTRATION.



IN THE DARKNESS, GAVIN REMEMBERS DARKNESS... A MAMMOTH CAVERN DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH... AND MOGRA, MEGALLA'S HIDEOUS SISTER, SEEKING TO FREE THE UNHOLY POWER OF HIM BELOW. THE ELDERS HAD SENSED THAT FOUL ENERGY DRAWING NEARER TO THE SURFACE, AND SENT US TO STOP IT. FATHER LEFT US ON A PRECIPICE OVERLOOKING MOGRA'S SORCEROUS DEVICE TO SPARE US THE DIRECT BRUNT OF THE BATTLE, AND CIRCLED TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE CAVERN.



'A BATTLE, YET WE CAME AS A FAMILY... MY MOTHER ROSANNA, MY SISTER CRESCENT, INCUBUS THE CAT, MY FATHER AND I, WITH HIS SPECIAL GIFT, FATHER WOULD DRAW ON OUR POWER AND FUSE IT WITH HIS TO FORGE A MIGHTY WEAPON OF THE MIND AS HE CIRCLED FARTHER AWAY, OUR MINDS MERGED CLOSER TOGETHER. THEN CAME THE CHALLENGE'

MOGRA! I AM GARTH THE CLANBINDER! IN THE NAME OF THE NINE WHOM I SERVE, I COMMAND YOU TO STOP! THE RELEASE OF THE UNSPEAKABLE ONE IS FORBIDDEN BY ALL HIGH LAW! YOU TAMPER WITH A FORCE YOU CANNOT CONTROL!

CLANBINDER! WE MEET AGAIN I HAVE WAITED LONG FOR YOU TO FIND ME. MEGALLA EVEN SENT GRETCH FOR THE OCCASSION

YOU ARE DEEP IN THE EARTH CLANBINDER FAR FROM THE SKY-HOME OF THE LORDS OF LIGHT. HERE THE DEVOURER IS STRONGEST AND I AM TAPPED INTO HIS POWER! YOU SHOULD HAVE REMAINED ON THE SURFACE ABOVE FOR YOU SHALL NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN!!



"WE SENSE YOUR FAMILY NEARBY, CLANBINDER!" CACKLED MOGRA. "KNOW AS YOU DIE THAT THEY DIE WITH YOU!"

"AS THE TWO MIGHTY FORCES LASHED OUT, THE CAVERN RUPTURED IN A NOVA OF BLINDING LIGHT!"

"OUR PERCH CRUMBLLED BENEATH OUR FEET AS THE ROOF RAINED DOWN ON OUR HEADS."

"I BLACKED OUT... THEN SENSATION SLOWLY RETURNED AS FROM A GREAT DISTANCE ... MY BODY FELT FRAGMENTED INTO THOUSANDS OF TINY MOTES, AS IF I WAS SIFTING THROUGH SAND..."

"MUCH LATER, SOLIDITY RETURNED IN BRIGHT DAYLIGHT."

GARTH!
GARTH!!

QUICKLY, ALL OF YOU, GRAB MY HANDS!

GIVER BE PRAISED, WE MADE IT! I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WOULD BE ABLE TO PULL US ALL OUT OF THE HOLOCAUST AND THROUGH THOSE MILES OF EARTH IN THE WRAITH-STATE, BUT IT WAS OUR ONLY HOPE.

BUT FATHER! HE WAS TOO FAR AWAY FROM US!

"THEN CAME THE SEARCH, THE FRUITLESS SEARCH, AS THE POWER OF COMBINED MIND-TOUCH GROPED THROUGH SUBTERRANEAN DEPTHS."

I'M SORRY, ROSANNA, BUT IT'S NO USE. THE TOUCH OF GARTH'S LIVING MIND IS NOWHERE BELOW US. IT WAS THE CHANCE HE TOOK. WE CAN ONLY HOPE MOGRA AND HER EVIL DEVICE PERISHED AS WELL.

GRIEF YANKS GAVIN BACK TO THE PRESENT, TO THE EMPTINESS OF HIS CELL, AND TO THE MOUNTING THROB OF HIS UNCONTROLLABLE POWER.

GARTH...
GARTH...

HAD HIS MOTHER, HIS SISTER AND INCUBUS BEEN ABLE TO TRACE HIM AFTER HIS DISAPPEARANCE? IF THEY WERE TO FIND HIM, IT MUST BE SOON.

TO BE CONTINUED...

SF READING LIKE THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN EVERY DAY!

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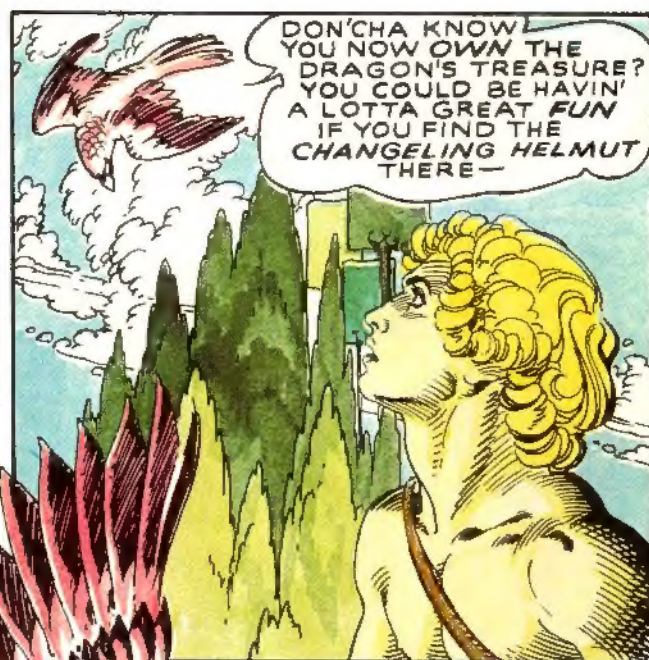
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Says "First Printing July 1979" on page 2.